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BOSTON PARKS AND
RECREATION
DEPARTMENT

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ACTION PLAN 70

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

CITY OF BOSTON

JOSEPH E. CURTIS

COMMISSIONER

CONFIDENTIAL

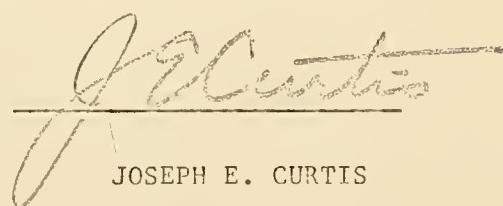
TO: THE HONORABLE KEVIN H. WHITE
RE: ACTION PLAN 70, PARKS AND RECREATION, CITY OF BOSTON

My initial observation period of three months has ended. I have seen the city's major parks and recreation holdings, and a number of the neighborhood recreation programs in operation. Discussions and conferences have been held with a broad cross-section of Boston citizenry, including department staff, private agency personnel, and interested lay people.

I wish to acknowledge the ready assistance of the Mayor's office, the generous help of the department heads and City Hall personnel, and the enthusiastic cooperation of members of the Parks and Recreation Department.

The general public has been most hospitable and very informative. I consider myself fortunate to be part of the New Boston.

The following is respectfully submitted for your consideration.



JOSEPH E. CURTIS
COMMISSIONER

January 5, 1970

JEC:MR

The City of Boston treasures a legacy of pioneer effort and early vision in the field of urban park and playground design. The brilliant Frederick Law Olmstead, master planner of the late nineteenth century, created in Boston a network of parks, vistas and sylvan delights which dazzled the world. Joseph Lee, known as the "father of the playground movement," stimulated a nation at the turn of the century with his basic theories of play and leisure in a Boston setting.

Many years have passed since that era. Much work needs to be done to restore Boston to its position as the most stimulating and beautiful city in America. It can be done!

A DETERMINATION

It is herewith determined that the citizens of Boston need and deserve the finest in recreation opportunities and park facilities. The Department of Parks and Recreation shall concentrate its total resources toward achieving that goal.

Short-term improvements will bring results in from one to three years. Long-term improvements will take from three to five years for full effect.



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BASIC POLICIES

The following are three basic policies offered in the best interest of the public, and which provide the maximum recreation and park services at minimum cost.

1. Policy-Decentralization

The recreation programs and park maintenance functions of this department shall be decentralized. The main thrust of both recreation and maintenance will be focused at the neighborhood level. In each large established neighborhood, the elements of program planning and facility maintenance will be placed in the hands of competent staff members working closely with a local citizens recreation council. These local councils will be informed, assisted and strengthened. In effect, indigenous recreation and park programs will be operated in each area or neighborhood, rather than one monolithic city-wide program. Local character, tastes, needs, culture and flavor will be emphasized.

2. Policy-Joint Facility Use

The operation and maintenance of any recreation playground, hall, park, center or other facility shall be based upon the degree to which the public needs and uses that facility as a leisure center or active gathering place. No facility -- public or private -- will be supported or maintained indefinitely when the community action and focus of activity are elsewhere. The department will devote its assistance, equipment and leadership to those programs and sites which best meet the recreation needs of the public, wherever those location may be.

Department facilities, wherever possible, will be made available to all legitimate community groups and agencies that provide wholesome recreation activities for the public. This is economical in terms of use and costs, and broadening in terms of program variety.

3. Policy-Program Co-sponsorship

The department shall actively co-sponsor wholesome recreation, cultural and sports programs with any legitimate club, agency, or other community organization that so desires. Thus, organizations will be assisted in their program efforts, the department will be assured of broad-based citizen participation in planning and operating recreation programs, and the public will be provided the widest range of recreation activities possible.

No recreation program or event will be conducted solely by the department, if a legitimate and willing co-sponsoring agency or agencies can be found.

SPECIFIC STEPS

ADMINISTRATIVE

1. Decentralization - Decentralize all operations of the department. Focus authority and action ability in 12-14 distinct neighborhood units, with only essential administrative control retained by the Commissioner.
2. Schools and Police - Seek close cooperation with the Boston Police Department and the Boston Public Schools as the two largest agencies in most intimate contact with the public. This must be a regular liaison to be effective, and can be of invaluable aid to all departments concerned.
3. Advice - Obtain expert advice from the many highly skilled horticultural, management, finance and public service organizations in Boston. Examples: Boston Research Institute (Joseph Baressi), and the Arnold Arboretum (Dr. Wyman).
4. Concessions - Explore opportunities for additional leased concessions sensitively placed throughout the park system. These might include restaurants, snack bars, carousels, childrens zoos, miniature railroads, horseback and pony rides, tractor trains, boat rides and others. These could mean new delights and diversions in certain parks, and additional revenues for the city. Sound conservation practices and the public's good taste must be protected in the process.
5. Fees and Charges - Study thoroughly the department's present schedule of fees and charges. It is possible that considerable additional revenue may be realized even as services are being sharply improved.

6. Parks and Recreation Commission - Expand the role of the Parks and Recreation Commission to become a real "voice and ear" of the public. Regular meetings, inspection tours, visits by working officials, and regular contact with the citizenry will make this a responsible and effective organ of municipal government. It is the department's responsibility to keep Commission members fully informed on all matters so they will be in a position to provide educated advice and counsel.

7. Policies - Compile a clear set of basic policies and guiding principles for the department. These will define purposes and goals, and compel the department to keep on a planned and projected path of operation. These will be printed and distributed widely.

8. Annual Report - Publish an annual report outlining the year's accomplishments and its unsolved problems. Also, an annual evaluation of the department's effectiveness will be made and included in the annual report.

9. MDC Cooperation - Seek close cooperation with the MDC as the other major park facility and recreation agency within the City of Boston. This is essential to avoid duplication of effort, and to achieve a high degree of program effectiveness. Inevitably, such cooperation will facilitate the use of the vast MDC recreation plant, and the city's recreation program will be enhanced. The Boston taxpayer and the recreation participant will both benefit from such joint efforts.

10. Reorganization - The major executive positions of the department will be carefully studied and redrawn to achieve the greatest effectiveness. A system of Deputy Commissioners (exempt positions) should be substituted for the present Executive Secretary, Chief Engineer, and Director of Recreation.

PERSONNEL

1. Promotions - Promote from within the department where possible. Presently, personnel are being interviewed and histories of performance and self-development studied. All regular staff who have shown initiative, or who seek greater responsibility, will be given early opportunities for advancement. Candidates will be sought from outside only when no staff person is available to fill specific posts.
2. Recognition - Recognize employees' outstanding work, creative effort, and long service promptly and publicly. The public will be made aware of the many talented and industrious civil servants in the Boston department of Parks and Recreation.
3. Training - A comprehensive training program will begin shortly, placing every man and woman employee in a yearly training and education cycle. A qualified staff member has already been designated Department Training Officer and has received special instruction in Washington, D.C. The goal is a highly-trained, more effective department staff serving the New Boston.
4. Recruitment - A recruiting program will bring new faces and young professional into the department. These people will come from many educational and social levels, ranging from school dropouts to PhD's. In addition, steps will be taken to recruit heavily from within the Boston neighborhoods themselves, with particular emphasis on black and Puerto Rican leadership. A career incentive program will be instituted. Full cooperation by unions representing department employees will be invited.

5. University Liaison - Active liaison between the department and colleges, universities, management schools and training agencies of Greater Boston will be established. These sources are rich in creative student and faculty talent, learning laboratory facilities, advanced training equipment, and other valuable teaching and management aids.

6. Youth - Youth will be involved deeply in the planning and operation of the department. They will be brought in at a variety of levels -- as junior leaders, apprentices, college field work students, youth advisory councils, internes, and as young full-time professionals.

7. Handicapped - Efforts should be made to employ in the department Bostonians who, despite physical handicaps, can become productive civil servants. Experience indicates that such people turn in fine work records when given the opportunity.

MAINTENANCE

1. Vandalism - Concentrated campaign will be launched against vandalism (\$1,000,000 annual cost), inviting the help of every Boston agency, utilizing every available technique. Public education, staff training, youth patrols, block watchers, police cooperation, court and probation liaison, newspaper assistance -- every resource will be tapped. It must be clearly established for every Bostonian that vandalism has reached an intolerable level.
2. Litter - Similar effort will be launched to reduce trash, litter and dumping in parks and playgrounds.
3. "Flying Squad" - This specially trained, specially equipped maintenance crew (2-4 men) will be prepared to move on short notice to any site where small-scale, urgent repairs or construction is required. This will reduce those long delays and those periods when a play facility is inoperative due to a small but critical malfunction or damage.
4. New Machinery - New, labor-saving high efficiency machinery and equipment will be studied carefully for application to the department's work. The experience of allied fields such as building contractors, manufacturers, and transporters will be drawn upon. New devices and materials will be studied and tested to find better ways for doing the job.
5. Maintenance Training - Training for maintenance force will include safety procedures, auto mechanics, horticulture, welding, motor equipment operation, shop practices and other essential services. Regular training cycles will be established, and the services of reputable local industrial training agencies will be utilized. Training in effective supervision will also be stressed.

6. Manpower - Through close cooperation with local unions and personnel agencies, the department's manpower base will be broadened. Accredited apprentice programs will be established to bring in a supply of fresh young careerists. Also, retired men and women with valuable skills will be utilized on a part-time basis to provide experienced staff at peak periods, and on irregular schedules.
7. Efficiency - Overall maintenance operations will be carefully studied to determine new approaches to this tremendous challenge, the day-to-day care of a vast chain of recreation facilities in a major city. The valuable counsel of seasoned employees, as well as professional advisors, will be sought and followed.
8. Cemeteries - All operations will be reviewed, and a system established for rehabilitation and regular maintenance.
9. School of Horticulture and Tree Surgery - This center would be established within Franklin Park, and would recruit among residents living within 1-2 miles of the park. Instruction would be given by Arboretum personnel and members of the Department of Parks and Recreation. Graduates could be employed by the MDC, Public Schools, YMCA's, state agencies and the Department of Parks and Recreation.
10. Educational Trips - Education and scholarship trips for outstanding career gardeners and landscapers with the department to study the parks and gardens of America and Europe. They would then return and install the new ideas and concepts into the Boston parks and gardens.

CONSTRUCTION

1. Rehabilitation - Present program of rehabilitation at thirty park and recreation sites will be expedited.
2. New Construction - Present program of new construction, now in various stages from drawings to bid awarding, will be accelerated by the department's Engineering Division so that all projects will be underway by the Spring of 1970. This includes four new indoor-outdoor swimming pool installations and some 25 smaller projects. Additional personnel will be assigned to assist the Chief Engineer in carrying out this enormous task.
3. New Playgrounds - Ten existing playground sites will be selected in high need areas throughout the city where present facilities seriously warrant major repair or replacement. Each of these sites will be completely re-designed with full neighborhood cooperation. A totally new recreation facility will be built on the old site that will fully service that neighborhood in the 1970's. Each site will be built upon a theme or pattern determined by the neighborhood in which it is located.
4. Special Projects - Four strategically located sites, widely separated, will be developed as major new recreation-park facilities. One, a national first, will be a park-playground-recreation center serving exclusively the physically and mentally handicapped citizens of Boston. These persons number in excess of 10,000 and include blind, mentally retarded, paraplegics, cardiacs, paralytics, CP, MS, nephrosis and other handicapped of all ages. The other three locations, serving large areas of the city, will be designed upon the themes of Transportation, the Animal Kingdom, and Outer Space. Their layouts and installations will reflect those themes.

5. Master Action Plans - With the cooperation of the BRA, up-to-date master action plans will be developed for Franklin Park, the Fens, Olmstead Park-Jamaica Pond, Commonwealth Avenue, Columbus Park and the Arnold Arboretum. These plans will accommodate immediate and long-term improvements and will include both the visual design layout, and the action steps and techniques to execute the plans.

6. L Street Beach - The extensive bath house, beach and recreation facilities at the L Street Beach will be carefully appraised. This unique facility, very precious to the City of Boston, includes many strengths and weaknesses, and calls for major improvements and updating. Before any major investment is made, however, the future use of the facility must be determined. Here, close cooperation in planning with the MDC is essential, and the assistance of the BRA is most important.

7. Urban Beautification - Urban Beautification projects will be expanded to revive and enhance neighborhood gathering places and downtown pedestrian areas. Street furniture, sculpture, benches, trees, shrubs, fountains, new ground surfaces -- all will be utilized, and a major effort will be made to recruit strong support by lay groups, civic associations, conservation clubs, neighborhood alliances and historical societies. The powerful and effective action of the Back Bay Association and the Roxbury-Dorchester Beautification Committee represent this kind of strength.

8. Picnic Facilities - Picnic facilities for large community groups, as well as families, are lacking in Boston. Plans include the creation of 4 or 5 sites, each with some 20 charcoal grills and 40 tables, distributed strategically about the city. Auxiliary facilities will include toilets, parking areas, sports fields, and children's playground equipment.

9. Financial Aid - Aid, financial and physical, will be sought in all forms for these construction projects from state and federal agencies, foundations, estates, universities and other commercial, government and philanthropic organizations.

1. Conventional Activities - The conventional program of recreation activities will be expanded to include baton twirling, horseback riding, dance instruction, archery, gymnastics, soccer, chess and a wide variety of exciting leisure pursuits, especially in neighborhoods with heavy populations and poor program participation.
2. Girls' Activities - Girls' activities will be greatly expanded. Presently, they are being provided very little in comparison to boys' programs.
3. Young Adults - The vast area of leisure and recreation for young adults (20 to 30 years) will be scrutinized, and close communication with this dynamic age group will be established. These are the nurses, internes, white collar workers, teachers, secretaries, junior executives and young married couples. These people represent a massive portion of Boston's population, and they are very articulate about their recreation needs.
4. Teen Centers - Teen centers for ages 13-19 years of age will be established in close cooperation with neighborhood groups and organizations throughout the city.
5. Volunteers - The role of volunteers in the recreation program will be studied, and their valuable services utilized on a large scale.
6. Flying Squad - A "flying squad" of trained, experienced recreation leaders (2-4 persons) will be prepared to move quickly into any neighborhood recreation facility suffering from poor programming or from lack of community response. This team will remain long enough to restore vitality to the program, or to determine need for changes in staff or operations.

7. Handicapped - Programs of recreation for physically and mentally handicapped children will be expanded and enriched with new activities and techniques. Efforts will be made on two fronts: (a) the absorbing of some of these youth into the conventional programs, and (b) the opening of special programs for those who cannot integrate within the conventional program.

8. Communications - Direct communications are being established between the department and the hundreds of spirited hobby, physical culture, conservation and sports groups within the city. These include clubs for judo, chess, history, curling, soccer, model plane flying, park improvements, and others. The purpose of this communications net is to encourage more public participation in these wonderful activies, and to stimulate more co-sponsored special events between the city and these private groups.

9. BHA Cooperation - Boston Housing Authority has invited the department's cooperation and has offered total cooperation in return. The aim here will be a broad look at recreation programs, or the lack of same, in the city's public housing projects. The neediest locations will receive first attention, and the ultimate goal is a pattern of wholesome recreation programs for all ages at each of these population concentrations. First step is a complete tour of plant and facilities at each of the housing sites; the second, an intense planning session between the staffs of the two departments, Housing and Parks and Recreation.

10. Labor Assistance - Unions, labor organizations, management corporations and other centers of industrial power in Boston will be invited to become partners with this department in efforts to provide finer recreational programs for all ages in the City of Boston.

11. Movements - Bicycling, hiking, swimming, camping, nature study and other high-participation, low-budget type of recreational "movements" will be actively encouraged and assisted by the department. Lay leadership and volunteer efforts are extremely important in such programs, and their positive value in urban centers can be enormous.

12. New Programs - Day camps, summer physical fitness projects, horseback riding, boat construction and sailing, roller skating, boxing, model plane flying and a vastly expanded swimming program are some of the elements of the department's expanded activity plans for the near future.

13. Experiments - Unusual new programs and devices will be explored and, if successful, will be added to Boston's inventory of programs. These include aviation flight training, skating on plastic ice panels, special driving area for "tuffy" outdoor sports vehicles, adventure playgrounds, motor center for teens, motoramas, and cross-country contests, and youth hosteling.

INFORMATION

1. Booklets - Informative booklets and brochures will be prepared to provide the public with information on parks, recreation facilities, opening and closing hours, fees and charges, registration procedures, activity programs, safety procedures and other pertinent facts. These will be widely distributed.
2. Annual Report - An annual report and review of the department will be instituted in a form that can be circulated widely, and readily understood. This report on the stewardship of the department will spotlight successes, failures, department trends, problem solving techniques, the degree of public participation, a financial report and other significant data. This will also incorporate much information and communication from the neighborhood recreation units.
3. "Operation Identity" - "Operation Identity" will identify clearly for the citizen of Boston the physical projects, facilities, staff, vehicles, and other elements of the tax-supported public parks and recreation operation in this city. New attractive signs on all parks and playgrounds, distinctive marking and lettering on all department vehicles and machinery, work uniforms for maintenance men, leader uniforms for recreation workers -- all will contribute to the improvement of staff morale, and will facilitate identity by the public.
4. Communications - A pattern of communications, particularly among youth, will be fostered. Newspaper articles and columns, television appearances and liaison with weekly neighborhood newspapers will be encouraged through young volunteers and active program papers will be encouraged through young volunteers and active program participants. Thus, there will be an active flow of information above and beyond that provided by staff members of the department.

5. Open Meetings - Open meetings of the Parks and Recreation Commission will be held for the public regularly and frequently. At such meetings, agendas will be brief, leaving most of the time for citizens to appear and bring their recreation problems and needs before the Commission members. Meetings will be held at various locations in the city, both day and night, and these meetings will be announced in advance so that all interested citizens may appear and speak.

6. Speaking Engagements - All members of the department will be encouraged to serve as public speakers and articulate representatives of the department throughout the city. It is extremely important that citizens of Boston know their recreation and park professionals much better and the fine work that they do.



